

In the Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) An expanding method for expanding an adhesive sheet with respect to a plate-like article stuck to said adhesive sheet, mounted to a ring-shaped frame through said adhesive sheet, and diced into individual chips by a dicing device, after the dicing to increase spacings between said individual chips, comprising:

a conveying step of conveying said plate-like article together with a chuck stage of said dicing device to a different area in said dicing device without being detached from said chuck stage after the dicing of said plate-like article;

an expanding step of expanding said adhesive sheet so as to produce spacings between individual chips with said plate-like article being mounted to said frame in a wafer spreader of an expansion ~~station~~ device; and

an expansion maintaining step of maintaining an expanded state of said adhesive sheet with the spacings between individual chips unchanged and with said plate-like article remaining mounted to said frame after said expanding step by ~~gathering~~ nipping or pinching a loose part of the expanded adhesive sheet formed near an outer periphery of the adhesive sheet by the expansion of the adhesive sheet to form ~~[[an]]~~ a looped annular protrusion surrounding the chips and by nipping and securing facing sides of the annular protrusion into a closed loop, and

conveying said plate-like article from the wafer spreader of said expansion device together with said frame with the increased spacings between said chips being maintained unchanged.

2. (Original) The expanding method according to claim 1, wherein said expanding step includes a step of heating and stretching said adhesive sheet.

3. (Previously Presented) The expanding method according to claim 1, wherein said expansion maintaining step includes a step of welding or bonding a base of said annular protrusion of said adhesive sheet.

4. (Previously Presented) The expanding method according to claim 3, wherein the step of welding or bonding said base of said annular protrusion formed in said adhesive sheet is performed while the chuck stage is rotated.

5. (Previously Presented) The expanding method according to claim 1, further comprising:

placing said plate-like article on said chuck stage of said dicing device, and wherein the expanding step includes a step of temporarily maintaining the expanded state of said adhesive sheet on said chuck by holding the adhesive sheet

6. (Previously Presented) The expanding method according to claim 5, wherein said expanding step is performed by said expansion device in a dicing area of said dicing device after the dicing of said plate-like article,

said plate-like article with the fully expanded state of said adhesive sheet being temporarily maintained is conveyed to a different area in said dicing device together with said chuck stage, and

said expansion maintaining step is performed in said different area.

7. (Previously Presented) The expanding method according to claim 5, wherein said expanding step and said expansion maintaining step are performed in said different area in said dicing device.

8. (Cancelled).

9. (Original) The expanding method according to claim 1, wherein a heat-shrinkable sheet is used as said adhesive sheet, and

said expanding step and said expansion maintaining step are simultaneously performed by heating said adhesive sheet in at least a pair of areas sandwiching said plate-like article in parallel with a dicing line of said plate-like article in the portion of said adhesive sheet between said plate-like article and said frame.

10. (Original) The expanding method according to claim 9, wherein said adhesive sheet is heated in at least a pair of areas sandwiching said plate-like article in parallel with a dicing line in one direction of said plate-like article, and in at least a pair of areas sandwiching said plate-like article in parallel with a dicing line perpendicular to the dicing line in said one direction, and

heating temperatures of said areas are individually controlled according to the state of increase in the spacings between said individual chips.

11. (Previously Presented) The expanding method according to claim 9, wherein after the dicing of said plate-like article, said adhesive sheet is heated without said plate-like article being detached from said chuck stage of said dicing device.

12. (Currently Amended) An expanding method for [[for]] expanding an adhesive sheet with respect to a plate-like article stuck to said adhesive sheet, mounted to a ring-shaped frame through said adhesive sheet, and diced into individual chips by a dicing device, after the dicing to increase spacings between said individual chips, comprising:

a conveying step of conveying said plate-like article together with a chuck stage of said dicing device to a different area in said dicing device without being detached from said chuck stage after the dicing of said plate-like article;

an expanding step of expanding said adhesive sheet so as to produce spacings between individual chips with said plate-like article being mounted to said frame in a wafer spreader of an expansion device; and

an expansion maintaining step of maintaining an expanded state of said adhesive sheet with the spacings between individual chips unchanged and with said plate-like article remaining mounted to said frame after said expanding step by ~~gathering~~ nipping or pinching a loose part of the expanded adhesive sheet formed near an outer periphery of the adhesive sheet by the expansion of the adhesive sheet to form [[an]] a looped annular protrusion surrounding the chips, and

wherein a heat-shrinkable sheet is used as said adhesive sheet,

said expanding step includes a step of applying tension to said adhesive sheet, and

said expansion maintaining step includes a step of heating and shrinking said loose part of the expanded adhesive sheet near the outer periphery of the adhesive sheet to eliminate said loose part.

13. (Original) The expanding method according to claim 12, wherein said loose part is formed after the expanded state of said adhesive sheet in the portion on which said expanded plate-like article is stuck is maintained by suction or mechanically, and

said maintenance by suction or mechanical maintenance is released after said loose part is heated and shrunk.

14. (Previously Presented) The expanding method according to claim 12, wherein said plate-like article and said frame are relatively separated to expand said adhesive sheet, and

the relative separation between said plate-like article and said frame is terminated to form said loose part.

15. (Previously Presented) The expanding method according to claim 12, wherein said adhesive sheet is pressed between said plate-like article and said frame to expand said adhesive sheet, and

the press of said adhesive sheet between said plate-like article and said frame is released to form said loose part.

16. (Previously Presented) The expanding method according to claim 12, wherein an annular portion of said adhesive sheet surrounding said plate-like article is heated in a ring shape to shrink said loose part.

17. (Previously Presented) The expanding method according to claim 12, wherein after the dicing of said plate-like article, said adhesive sheet is expanded without said plate-like article being detached from said chuck stage of said dicing device.

18. (Currently Amended) An expanding method for [[for]] expanding an adhesive sheet with respect to a plate-like article stuck to said adhesive sheet, mounted to a ring-shaped

frame through said adhesive sheet, and diced into individual chips by a dicing device, after the dicing to increase spacings between said individual chips, comprising:

a conveying step of conveying said plate-like article together with a chuck stage of said dicing device to a different area in said dicing device without being detached from said chuck stage after the dicing of said plate-like article;

an expanding step of expanding said adhesive sheet so as to produce spacings between individual chips with said plate-like article being mounted to said frame in a wafer spreader of an expansion device; and

an expansion maintaining step of maintaining an expanded state of said adhesive sheet with the spacings between individual chips unchanged and with said plate-like article remaining mounted to said frame after said expanding step by ~~gathering~~ nipping or pinching a loose part of the expanded adhesive sheet formed near an outer periphery of the adhesive sheet by the expansion of the adhesive sheet to form ~~[[an]]~~ a looped annular protrusion surrounding the chips,

wherein said expanding step includes a step of relatively vertically separating said plate-like article and said frame, and applying a lateral force to said adhesive sheet, and

said expansion maintaining step includes a step of sticking a different ring-shaped frame to said expanded adhesive sheet, and cutting said adhesive sheet near an outer periphery of said different frame outwardly of a position at which the adhesive sheet is held.

19. (Original) The expanding method according to claim 18, wherein said lateral force applied to said adhesive sheet is applied by inflating an airbag.

20. (Previously Presented) The expanding method according to claim 18, wherein said frame and said different frame are of the same type and dimensions.

21-30. (Cancelled).